

THE SECRET OF OUR DAILY TASKS

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THE THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

ADYAR, MADRAS 20, INDIA

1954

Sold by
The Theosophical Press
Wheaton, Illinois

THE SECRET OF OUR DAILY TASKS

MANY of you must be familiar with the exquisite and pathetic little poem of Charles Kingsley—*The Three Fishermen*. As I pondered over this lecture of mine—*The Secret of Our Daily Tasks*—I thought of those striking lines which in many ways describe life and work for so many millions in the world.

“For men must work and women must weep,
For there is little to earn and many to keep,
Though the harbor-bar be moaning.”

Our life is set on all sides in a framework of tasks. Most of these tasks give us little inspiration, and I think probably most of us would heartily endorse the classical statement of one of Dickens' characters, Mr. Mantalini, who said when he described life that it was “one demnition horrid grind.”

Now it is exactly that for most of us. There is a quality in our daily task, of crushing out the spirit

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of expansiveness which seems natural to us. The organization of men's lives is to call forth from each the best that he can give to the community, while giving to him that which he needs, all that he needs. In this process, tasks are obligatory upon us, and more and more the spirit of modern civilization is that of the assignment of special tasks. These tasks you will find in your experience are first interesting, so long as they are fresh. Whatever is the work which you are called upon to do in the beginning, there is an attractiveness because of novelty, but after a while when it is the same piece of work time after time, day after day, something mechanical enters into the problem, and then afterwards something oppressive, like the description of Mr. Mantalini.

When you look at the lives of men you will find that there is an attempt on their part to make the best of it. This best which they are striving to make out of their daily tasks consists in erecting a kind of framework into which to place the various tasks of life. This framework varies according to the temperament of the individual. There are two main types which you can find with regard to this problem, those who make a framework of only this life—for they cannot believe in any other life beyond

the grave—and others who accept the religious standpoint with a kind of framework of eternity, within which to set their daily tasks.

Consider the first group of people and the way that, within this limited life, they strive to make the best out of their daily tasks. Many of them will strive to gain out of the tasks of life a sense of contentment so that at least they may cull, as it were, a little, a few of the flowers that life here and there can be made to produce, if one cultivates life. They understand that if one cultivates life it is possible, by an adjustment to such tasks as destiny gives one, and to one's environment, to derive a modicum of contentment in spite of so much that is opposing the realization of one's desires.

Others go a step further than mere contentment. They strive, if possible, to give usefulness to life, so that in addition merely to being contented they want to add something of a creative quality, so that they shall have given to life something noble, something that shall delight the hearts and minds of others.

There are a few who look upon life from a somewhat different standpoint, as a part of a larger whole, an opportunity to express their character. They feel that there is within them a message to be given, something to be in spite of the difficulties of

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environment, some new invention in the world processes, some modification of civilization which shall bear their stamp, and so they purposely plan to express their character through work. While not believing that there is any kind of futurity of personal life beyond the grave, they still take up life from a masterly standpoint and go through that life trying to mold it to express character.

Such a conception of expressing character through life is one of the most striking in the Hebrew faith. You will find that in them the powerful impulse given to the imagination is a sense of righteousness. In old Judaism there is no vision, at least nothing clear of any kind of a life beyond the grave. The vision is concentrated on the expression of the individual's character, so that in all that he does the spirit of righteousness may be made manifest, a righteousness pleasing unto the Lord. That is a very wonderful way of expressing the character. That form of expression of the character is characteristic of the idealist, and there are hundreds of variants of idealists, who do not believe in the framework of the future, but out of their daily tasks strive to create something noble to offer, try to give to the world a kind of worship of a great ideal. This group takes life as it is. They do not question what

is going to be the ultimate result of this life, because they do not believe in one to come, beyond the grave, but they do limit themselves to contentment or usefulness, a noble idealism within the framework of this one life.

But there is also another framework which I call the framework of eternity, for when a person believes in the life beyond the grave it is a continuing life. All the religions which proclaim to you a continuing life beyond the grave have a general vision of eternity, but what is the relation of the tasks of this life to that eternity in which they believe? Their relation towards their tasks is not that of the idealist, but is far more that of the individual who is going to escape from the burden of this life into a world, a condition, where that burden shall not be. The gospel of the religious life which is proclaimed in the religions of the East and West is a gospel of escape. I mean by that, that the daily tasks are to be done with a view of escape from the limitations of today. Many find their daily tasks possible only because there is a vision of eternity.

This daily acceptance, into which so many are forced by their environment, can at least be borne if you surrounded such a life with a kind of atmosphere of eternity. You may have dreams of heaven, and

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a condition of happiness which has nothing to do with such tasks as you have here every day.

When you examine this vision of eternity, this framework within which the majority of men set their daily tasks, you find that there is no connection between life in eternity and the tasks they have to do here. The tasks of men cease with the casting aside of the body, and those tasks are not wanted in eternity. What are the tasks of the majority of people in this country? Business in one form or another. Most people are working at some kind of business. Take the ordinary business man. He has to go to the office daily, or he has to go out into the fields to farm. He may be religious and therefore his business of daily life is set in a framework of eternity, but obviously there is no business in heaven, no farming that needs to be done. Becoming an expert in business, a successful farmer is laudable, but what connection is there between the success which he makes against competition, against hardship, against difficulty, what relation between that success and the life he is to live in eternity? You will therefore find, as you examine those who believe in the framework of eternity, and the lives which they live at their tasks, that there is no connection.

What is the future of the doctor to be when he is in heaven? We shall all have perfect health in heaven, and yet he has constantly, for a whole lifetime, to become expert in the understanding of the physical body, and in the understanding of human nature in connection with it. It is all to be thrown aside when he begins his life in eternity. Again, the journalistic profession is one of the most vibrant, but not needed in heaven, obviously.

Take the whole make-up life, the mother who spends her time looking after her family, and seeing to the family's needs, who sometimes makes a wonderful success, whose character grows, who stands shining with a measure of contentment, of duties nobly done, because she has learned how to work with a spirit of sympathy and efficiency. What shall be the framework of eternity, after she leaves what she has learned here? And so in one profession after another. One of the greatest profession today, so necessary in the world's reorganization, is the engineer. But nothing of what he learns is wanted in heaven. What of the teacher? Teachers may be required in heaven. There is a faint possibility. What of the preacher? What of the soldier? That is a profession which brings out very high attributes, not merely in the department of the army and

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fighting, but in the power to organize, to handle men, to bring out of men a quality of heroism. Is this perfect soldier to drill the angels? You will see as you examine daily life from the religious standpoint that it has no relationship to eternal life. As a matter of fact most people do not analyze life in terms of eternity because the religious teaching given to them does not give any such vision.

When I have said that most religions preach the gospel of escape I include also the great faiths of the Orient. They believe in reincarnation, and that there is a law of justice, of cause and effect, the teaching of karma, yet fundamentally, as they proclaim the finality of liberation, it is a freedom from such tasks, as the series of lives on earth gives them, and yet the character is made perfect. When the character, therefore, has been brought to the threshold of liberation, all this great process of the universe ceases to have further meaning, and so we have, once again in that framework of eternity, this quality of escaping from such life as this universal process has created.

It is possible for us to make another type of framework, which shall be intellectually more satisfying, which shall prove itself to our hearts and minds as having a greater power of inspiration, either than

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the religious framework of eternity or the ordinary framework of idealism of one who does not believe in eternity. I think it is possible. And it is such a framework that I want to outline to you. It is this framework which becomes inevitable to you as you study certain fundamental ideas known to men as Theosophy, although they are not restricted to The Theosophical Society and its activities, nor to this age. They have always existed. What has been done by the Theosophical movement is to gather these ideas and present them to the modern mind, but fundamentally it is a framework of ideas that has existed always.

In this framework there is a conception of man which is designated as Theosophical, different from the religious conception. The religious conception regards the individual as one who has to go through certain tasks, by which he is going to perfect himself, before he is fit to enter into a condition of salvation or liberation. But the opportunity of the individual lies in the fact that he is living in the midst of an opportunity he is always creating. The individual is then a center of creative force, creating even now by his attitudes, his vision, not only a liberation from this life, but something that is eternity now, a heaven which he will continue creating in heaven.

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Even in heaven the creative quality in you will go on creating, and you will be a dynamo to transform the here and the now, which are imperfect, to something which will be more perfect in eternity. The individual as a center of creative force is, in this conception, very God, so that he is not seen as separate from the great Author of the universe, but linked in an intimate way, so intimate that it is difficult to describe except in terms of similes. A favorite simile is that of a great flame arising, and if you have seen a flame made of logs, you know that within the flame are tiny sparks. Each tiny spark is a tiny flame, not different in substance from that of the great flame, and if it were to light on dry material it would itself become a flame.

Another simile equally expressive is that of the rough diamond, a genuine crystal when dug from the earth, but rather yellowish and not very attractive. But place it under the diamond cutter's stone using powdered diamond with which to cut it, and finally you have the perfect stone.

Thus is man related to God in a similar way. Within him is perfection, within him divinity, but both perfection and divinity are to be realized. Clearly this conception of man is different from the ordinary

conception of man, the sinner bound to the wheel of birth and death, from which he has to escape.

In the West I should call the conception of God in religion that of a static God, Who once brought the universe into being, then stands apart from the creation. He is static. He is offering you opportunities for salvation, but He is not intimately related to this world and all its affairs, for He is a God in heaven. Similarly in the Eastern standpoint the substratum of all things is the Absolute. It is the sum total of all possibilities and yet is not involved in those possibilities as they manifest themselves. In other words a static God made the universe once, but now is apart from it, and watches.

It is obvious as we look at the universe, even when we accept the creation of a Creator, that the universe is not perfection. There is scarcely ever perfection, naturally, and yet it can be made perfect. There are so many imperfections in Nature's leaves and flowers, and yet here and there everything can be educed, drawn out, in perfection. And similarly it is that, as you examine the universe in all its phases, you are bound to admit that a perfection is possible, but it requires a Perfection from outside, a Guidance to call forth such perfection.

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Hence in the framework I am offering is the conception of God Who is a Creator of an imperfect universe. But as He fashions His world it is equally plain that He has a Plan, not crystallized in the beginning of creation, but to be realized by Him through man whose latent divinity is to be released as is the perfection of the rough diamond. That divinity in every human being is called forth by God as each individual releases the perfection of the universe in himself in his cooperative participation.

Man, then, has a role in eternity, not of salvation, not of escape, but rather of qualifying himself, of equipping himself, to work with the great Master, in order to shape the universe into ever greater and greater perfection. In other words our goal is to release, to call out that universe as it is now and will be, the perfection which has been innate, hidden, because it comes from God, Who is perfection.

Our daily tasks, then, are related within this framework which I offer to a work for perfection, for which we are called to work in eternity.

How are we being taught to cooperate in releasing the perfection of the universe? We are taught by life as it is. Life, using that word in the broader sense, has existed ever since the first savage man

and from that first day life has been a progress of organization of activity. The first activities which we note are those of the savage, hunting or fighting. Slowly uniting himself to a few, to make the unit, the family, the tribe, the larger body, etc., the work of unifying went on. Slowly civilization appears in each epoch, something more refined, with a greater quality or organization, greater possibilities—a perfection to be released in the home life through some kindliness, through a quality of sacrifice of one towards another; perfection in the community, as the community organizes itself for work and for play. The appearance of all the delicate, lovely things of life in a perfection is an element, then, in the organization of the universe, bit by bit, through the cooperation of the people who compose that universe.

In the beginning the tasks for life are simple. Since the individual is to cooperate in eternity, to release the perfect universe, you must propound for him an eternal life at work. Not one lifetime for work, and then eternity in heaven, when he does not work. He must cooperate all the time at higher and higher tasks. If you do not accept the law of reincarnation you must postulate that, in that life beyond the grave, you must be free to release

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your own perfection, free to express the divine or perfect universe. It is easier, intellectually, as you look at man who develops one capacity after another, to see that it is more reasonable for man to release the capacities required in eternity, by his coming back again and again since the conditions are here, ready for his learning. Here I am as a lecturer, but there are so many things I would like to do. Who will give me music lessons in heaven when I have the music teachers here? Surely it is more sensible, if I am to fulfill that aspect of myself, that I should come back here to work where the conditions are already prepared. You will find if you think along that line that reincarnation becomes the only sensible idea for the perfection of character. The individual is to be a creative force, steadily creating more and more perfection in eternity. He has here, then, the opportunity for the organization of his character along dozens and dozens of lines which are necessary for that process of perfecting.

Now in the first organization he is given work to do, and in most of that work he agrees with the character in Dickens that life is "a demnition horrid grind." But as he comes back life after life he begins to realize that there is a kind of loyalty possible to the work. After being in that grind

again and again he becomes so bound to it that in making the best of it he achieves a kind of release from the grind, not by escape but by an inner release, for the moment you have a sense of loyalty to the work a new quality of spirituality touches you and, as you are busy at your daily and tiresome tasks, life clears for you.

You bring about this quality of loyalty to the work first through dissatisfaction. There is a dissatisfaction rooted in us, so that we are restless, but it is that very restlessness and dissatisfaction which teaches us that quality which I have called loyalty.

This same message, exquisitely put by George Herbert, one of the Elizabethan poets, is very beautiful. He does not call it loyalty, but he writes the poem called *The Pulley* :

When God at first made man,
 Having a glass of blessing standing by,
 Let us (said he) pour on him all we can :
 Let the world's riches which dispersed lie
 Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way ;
 Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour,
 pleasure ;

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When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone, of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gift instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature ;
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness ;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.

That is the great problem in one aspect of our daily lives, our daily tasks. The poet calls it weariness. I call it loyalty for out of that weariness you begin to discover that there is a nobility possible in your work, that it is not chains which bind you, but that it is possible for you to discover yourself as something noble and different, as you do the work.

As life after life you go on learning this lesson of loyalty, when you have learned the lesson of loyalty to some task, then it is that there is given to

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you the opportunity of doing some great and significant piece of work which in some way is related to the great scheme that we call beauty. Look at the lives of men and you will find that here and there an individual gets a striking opportunity. It is as if the whole tide of Nature's forces were with him. And then a man like Lincoln gives a message of a work to be done, a loyalty of a nation to certain tasks. Every great individual, artist, composer, teacher, giver of any message, stands out dominant, inspiring, true, and work is done by him which links him to the great scheme of the perfection of the universe in a way he could not have been linked in other stages.

After such a man does a great work—there are many instances in the lives of men who have given great contributions—so often it happens that somehow life seems to pass him by. The task is taken from his hands by others, and he is, to use a trite phrase, laid on the shelf, and he feels a sense of dissatisfaction that he can no longer give the great message he once gave. That, too, is a part of his becoming a great center of creative force in eternity. After you have created some one thing there must be a period when you must judge what you have created, and decide in what way it can be

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rectified, for none of us create the perfect thing. We may think it is perfect, but it is deficient in some way, and it is necessary for us to know in what way. So it is a part of the scheme that men shall have these periods of quiet, when they are put aside to work out their private individual reactions to something. Ill health, disappointment, being ignored by those who once looked up to them for leadership, in all kinds of ways life seems to leave them stranded, and they are utterly dissatisfied, not understanding that in this period they are to examine their work, and determine in what manner that work has to be rectified, for they will have to do it again, on a larger scale, but more beautifully, and it is necessary that there shall be self-examination.

This quality of self-examination is forgotten in western civilization. That self-examination must be a necessary part of your growth and life today, is a fact your feverish civilization does not understand.

In the Indian scheme where they understand this great framework of eternity, there is a definite plan in the life of the individual of the higher castes for this period of rectification. The first twenty-one years is that of the student who must understand the work to be done. Then another twenty-one

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years, or perhaps thirty years, as the man of family who marries, accepts the obligations and work of life, taking up its tasks, developing it, creating out of life what the civilization of his time requires. Then comes the third stage. This is the stage called the hermit-dweller, the dweller in the forest and in the homestead; he and his wife retire to some small hut within the family estate and there they are anchorites, no longer dwelling with life's problems, and in that stage of retirement there is a summation of that which they have done. In this dwelling, still vaguely in touch with their family, which supplies their needs, provides for them and their daily life, the husband and wife have a period of examination, of rectification.

Since there is no opportunity given you for rectification, the great scheme arranges, let us say, that an accident happens, which takes you to a hospital, sometimes a long illness, sometimes a great emotional shock, which gives you a time to dwell in seclusion, and from this feverish longing for things you are suddenly withdrawn. It is in order that you may examine dispassionately, stand apart from your work, and discover in what way you could do your work more nobly. You can only do that work efficiently when you train yourself

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to look at your work and your life, not as will, not as calling forth, not as creative, but as idea. The world must be seen by you no longer in this dynamic creative way, but you must extract out of the world the divine plan behind it. You must extract out of your own life the idea behind it with regard to the work you have done and the work which has been done by others. When you can separate yourself from this dynamic will, and from the result of the will which is the fruit and enjoyment and honors which come to you, and stand dispassionately, then you can for the first time discover the mysterious things in life. You begin to see how you can work artistically, how you can bring in the quality of perfection, how you can take up all your tasks and do them well, giving them this wonderful quality. Slowly you discover in yourself, something like the worker, who is also an artist. Having discovered that, because you have stood apart from your work, then it is that you begin to discover yourself, as the eternal worker. When you know what you are to be in eternity as a creative worker, then for the first time life begins. When you discover according to that inner temperament of yours what you are, then life reveals itself for the first time.

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Man has each his own framework. Each has some quality of perfection to release from himself. Are you to be a great giver of life? Is that your mission? So that from out of your nature there shall stream forth a quality of tenderness, of understanding, a quality of love for all things, so that you stand out enriching simply and beautifully the lives of all others?

Are you going to be a creator of beauty in music, song, poetry, the arts, the creator of beauty, taking this universe, molding it and giving new forms of beauty as it passes by?

Or are you to be a Nature lover, wherever you go, so that you are full of sympathy, of attachment to every blade of grass, so that you give a wonderful sense of sympathy to all that you contact?

Or are you going to be an organizer of good-will? Are you going to bring all men into a bond of good-fellowship and brotherhood? They are few who can do this.

Or are you to be a revealer of the wisdom, one who can mirror forth here below that exquisite perfection and inspiration and that creative divine mind?

Or are you to be the saintly type who unifies God and man, who stands at the center, the mediator between God above and Nature below?

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It does not matter what is that vision of yourself, that vision will come when you have developed loyalty to your work, when you have released something of that vision of that work, with the quality of the artistic which you can put into it, so that you can be given that work to do once again. And that work will be given to you once again, as little by little, growing in character you will release more and more perfection from within, and all life will daily discover that you are linked to this perfection which is waiting to be released in the universe.

For this way of proceeding with your daily tasks you need a philosophy. Select out of the world's ways of thought that special line of philosophical thought which will inspire you to change your attitude to your daily tasks. There is one very noble philosophy, Theosophy, which grows in grandeur, but Theosophy exists in many forms. Select your own. Create your own living framework, selecting such ideas as inspire you, as give you a sense of rightness.

What will be the end, as you go on with your daily tasks? You will discover your philosophy; see eternity in each task and find an eternal work, which is expected of you, so that in the great scheme you vision yourself as the perfect character.

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When once you have gained that vision, then whatever may be the hardships of life, always around the difficult task there will be atmosphere of eternity.

And then what will life be? Like the first piece of music from Bach, your whole life will be described by a melody, for there will be perfection all the way from the first to the last. When you have found your framework each task will be seen by you, not as a burden, but rather as a part of life, as an opportunity for loyalty, as an opportunity for shaping a master instrument, through which you are going to release your beauty for the universe. Even when you are burdened by suffering, you wait in patience until that particular task is finished, to be taken up once again as a heavier task before you. It is then that you create from it a lovely task.

I would like to read you a few lines written by Keble, who wrote so beautifully along the line I have tried to place before you:

“There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime,
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart

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Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret souls a holy strain
repeat."

Life can be like a great anthem or a great symphony, something which you know intimately, and which is always with you. And then, having so discovered it, you come to your last great discovery, and it is that everything, every task and the joy of it, the creative beauty of it, is an opportunity of offering. To whom? To what? That you will discover for yourself. It is not necessary that a label shall be given to it. You will discover to what, to whom, your offering is to be given, and then life becomes an offering all the time.

It has been put very, very beautifully in this exquisite phrasing of the hymn written by Frances R. Havergal :

"Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee ;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
Only as Thou dost approve ;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

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Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King ;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold ;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine ;
It shall be no longer mine ;
Take my heart ; it is Thine own ;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love ; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store ;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all, for Thee !

Instead of using the word Lord in this hymn one can use anything else. There is a Someone you will discover to Whom to offer all the time, just as the rose is exhaling a perfume as it opens. "Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

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And you will discover that the finest secret of your daily task is that some beauty, something not far away, but so near you, some inspiration, some glorious message from this Someone, can be with you, even in your direst pains. That discovery will give you strength to go through with the struggle for life, will give you courage, will teach you how to place a touch of beauty in every task, how to commune with yourself. That is the perfection that will stand before you, and to bring that perfection down into daily life, the daily task of life, is possible, and that is the greatest gospel which everyone of the greatest of mankind has tried to reveal, that our daily lives can be sanctified, beautified, permeated by the one Will, the one Beauty. Not only release but understanding will come to you through the ways of science, of art, of poetry, and if you understand truly what is the meaning of your daily task, then loyalty to it will also come. Little by little the vision of yourself as God's archetype, that perfected soul, who is dreaming all the time, and who will begin his true work in order that he may become one with every other soul, will become clearer to you, and you will find yourself linked to that great work in eternity, that work of perfection.

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This is a vision of our daily life, our daily task, which we can all discover, through which we all can look at that eternal beauty and perfection in which everything exists. And so we strive to leave on our work our mark of loyalty to that work, our mark of tenderness, of renunciation, of beauty, our mark of perfection. This makes life for us, beyond the bounds of the creed which each one of us holds. Each one of us can discover for himself a greater creed which will lift him up on high, and this discovery begins with our daily task, with a perfection to be created in this daily life, here and now, every day and every hour.

Printed by D. V. Syamala Rao, at the Vasanta Press,
The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras 20, India

